Quid Novi

McGill University, Faculty of Law
Volume 25, no. 2- September 14, 2004

In This Issue...

Quid Novi

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Editor's Note...

Welcome back to school everybody. Now that the deadline for course drops and changes has come and gone, I'm sure some of you are left with an unpleasant aftertaste from the course selection process.

Perhaps our current system can be compared to buying tickets for concerts or other events. People who manage to get good seats have an unfair advantage, which can be exploited by asking for favours in return of the seats and even selling the seats to the highest bidder. This comparison may be a bit harsh, but the situation will not improve and things will become worse unless things change.

And how things might change? I offer some ideas that could be easily transplanted from other successes. They may be too absurd to be implemented, but I'll just explore some possibilities.

Our course registration system could be based on the successful internet auction site. Bidding with real money is certainly out of place in an educational institution, so we could replace it with some sort of rewards system. Students could receive points for writing in the Quid, volunteering, class participation... the possibilities are endless! Those points could be used to bid on the courses that you want to take. This incentive-based approach could make the law school more dynamic, and allow students to be in courses they want to take.

Another crazy idea is removing the caps and adapting to the number of students. If 100 students register for JICP in the first term, then two classes are created. If there are only 30 students, then we only get one class. This simple market approach seems to make sense in our context. Maybe this could be implemented? We'd like to hear from you soon on this topic, or any other!

Aram

A Plea for an Official Inquiry into the Registration Nightmare

by Lisa Schneiderman (Law II)

Registration has been a nightmare for which there is no excuse. The difficulty registering for courses was evident in May since the majority of courses not reserved for first and second-year students were already closed. Yet, the problem still existed in September. We deserve an explanation.

If the problem lies in student course swapping (starting with upper year students saving courses for their friends) then the administration should get information from the IT department on which students were logged onto Minerva at the same time and changed courses. Send these students a warning letter and establish some sort of penalty system such as taking away their future registration priority if they commit the same offence.

My belief (until the inquiry tells me differently) is that the problem rests with the administration. Something brought about the need to engage in massive course swapping. Perhaps the course caps were not large enough to provide enough flexibility. As a result, students had to register for things just in case they were interested in a course. Or maybe the caps did not account for the size of the student body which led to a lack of course offerings.

However, the problem may lie even deeper. Maybe there is a lack of funding which does not allow for an adequate number of courses to be offered. If so, this fact should also be made known to prospective applicants.

Finally, why was the situation not resolved during the summer? Couldn't a wait-listing system or other solution have been implemented to deal with the problem?

I am writing this article even though the registration period is now over to make the gravity of the situation clear. It goes far beyond the fact that many of us are 10 days behind in a course and were unable to see a course syllabus before the drop day. The past 10 days have degraded the institution's ability to show respect for their students which impedes its ability to provide an atmosphere in which students can learn and prosper. Instead many of us were forced into the degrading situation of sitting nervously by a computer, hands on a mouse, competing for spaces that were opening up at 1 o'clock. It's not a normal environment for any institution, let alone a school.

It was a terrible failure on the part of the Faculty to allow so many students to begin the academic year under unnecessary stress and I hope Dean Kasirer gives us the respect we deserve by both addressing the situation and assuring us that steps have been taken to ensure that the problem will not occur again next semester. ■

Minerva, JICP and Me

by Mariam S. Pal (Law III)

So there I was, sitting in front of my computer at 7:45 a.m. getting ready to log into Minerva and add two more courses to get me up to 18 credits per term. Because I'm really cautious and I don't trust automated systems past a certain point, I had hooked up to the internet on my cable connection as well as through the telephone line on the McGill system just in case there was a problem. Little did I expect what happened next. I typed in my student number and then my Minerva password. Up pops a curt message that my password is invalid and that I can't log in. This happened over and over again. Registration was to begin at 8:00 AM so I called the Help Desk as instructed on the Minerva website. Surprise, surprise — the Help Desk only opens at 9:00 AM, much like a banker's hours. Does this make any sense to you? Several hundred law students are attempting to log in at 8:00 AM yet if anybody has a problem help is not available. In the meantime all the courses fill up. And that's exactly what happened. A few minutes after 9:00 a.m. my password mysteriously began to work and I logged in. Guess what? I was unable to register for more than eleven credits in the fall term. Absolutely everything was full. Including JICP. All summer long I regularly checked Minerva to see if anybody had dropped JICP. I'm in my last year and without this course I won't graduate. Upon flagging this issue to the Faculty I was told that I would just have to keep on trying and that hopefully a spot would open up. So Minerva's failure to recognize my password, probably due to the volume of students trying to log into the same time, became my problem. I was lumped in with anybody who was not able to log into the system for whatever reason. I might as well have slept in that morning.

So, with Minerva, if the system fails the student is stuck with the consequences. What really struck me is that there is no administrative process to address the kind of problem that I had. The reality of modern life is that computerized processes and systems do fail. And that's where humans have to step in. Humans have to find a way to help people from suffering the consequences of system failure. What I suggest is that a new process be developed so that if a student is unable to log into Minerva some sort of reporting procedure based on proof provided by the system administrators kicks in. If, for some reason, the failure of Minerva to recognize a password means that the student is unable to get into a required course and the processes demonstrated clearly that it was not a problem with the student but a problem with Minerva, then the student should be allowed into the course. At the very least, that student should be somehow given priority to get into the course as soon as somebody drops it. This seems to me to be only fair.

I think I logged in to try to get into JICP a couple of hundred times in the first few days of the term.

I did everything I could to get into JICP. I logged into Minerva regularly throughout the summer and I think I logged in to try to get into JICP a couple of hundred times in the first few days of the term. Friends offered me courses that I could use to swap in return for JICP. I wrote to the Assistant Dean asking to be allowed into the course. I felt like I was in some kind of endless Ebay auction. I entertained fantasies of suing McGill. Hmm, perhaps a class action suit? Frankly, it was starting to drive me crazy. I had not considered paying somebody for their spot although I innocuously offered to bake a cake for anyone who was willing to tell me that they were dropping JICP. Over the Labour Day weekend, even though my prospects were looking better, I began to vaguely consider whether I could discreetly offer to pay somebody's rent for a month in return for them giving up their place. After all, this is cheaper than me spending another year waiting around to graduate. It's a question of economics in the end of the day.

Happily my sweet cake offer did have a taker and yesterday we did the deed. My savior clicked "drop" and two seconds later I clicked "add." Hallelujah, JICP was mine. What a relief. I suppose this might prove that the system of informal course swaps between students works. Well, yes, but my point is a different one. Minerva failed me when I needed it to work and it took me more than three months to correct a situation that was not of my own making. I don't wish that on anyone and I hope that the Faculty and the people who run Minerva will together to develop a process to make sure that students are never made to pay for the system's failures. ■

On OCIs and "Selling Out"

by Michelle Dean (Law III)

Derek McKee's article on OCIs reminded me of something. For a few days I couldn't quite pin it down, but then it came to me. A few years ago the Harvard *Advocate* conducted an email interview with the writer and sometime-indie-literary-magazine editor Dave Eggers. One of the questions addressed to him was "Are you taking steps to keep shit real?" His reply is a wonderful rant that was later printed in *Harper's* and that you can find pretty easily on Google. Though he talks more about popular culture than anything else, one of his many targets is people who say no:

> I say yes, and Wayne Coyne [of the Flaming Lips] says yes, and if that makes us the enemy, then good, good, good. We are evil people because we want to live and do things. We are on the wrong side because we should be home, calculating which move would be the least damaging to our downtown reputations. But I say yes because I am curious. I want to see things.

I don't want to suggest that Derek wants us to limit ourselves in the name of coolness. (On the contrary, he was arguing for an expansion of horizons.) But there was something in his tone that was very dismissive of people who choose to go to firms, or do OCIs, that I found, well, unfair. He assumed that most of us go to New York, or Toronto, or any firm, for the money alone. I don't think it's unfair to say that he was cautioning against "selling out."

Here is the view from the other side of the fence. I assume I have what Derek would refer to as one of the "biggest, high-payingest, New-Yorkiest jobs." Derek says that I therefore enjoy "disproportionate esteem." This has not been my experience – the responses have been much more varied and subtle. When I came back from New York this summer many people did ask me how I had enjoyed it. When I would tell them that I had had a good time, in fact one of the best times of my life, more often than not the reply was incredulous. "Didn't you work really hard?" "How much of New York did you *actually* see?" "I couldn't ever do that, it's too insane, you're just that kind of person, Michelle." Some people then continued by telling me how awful New York, America, and often George W. Bush (thanks for the refresher) were. One person (who has not worked in New York) said, "I think you've got it all wrong about them."

No one at this Faculty has ever directly asked me *why* I applied to New York, though the *how* has been canvassed quite extensively. I have told some people my actual reasons, but usually as a way of swerving the topic from how I will ever survive at a big corporate law firm. The truth is, for the first time in a really long time, possibly even ever, New York felt like home. I knew how to live there. I love art and theatre and movies and books and New York loves them in the same way that I do. I like the American feeling of endless possibility – there's something in it that appeals to the leftist in me – and the impression that the stakes in every issue are incredibly high.

My firm also opened a lot of doors for me, some of which would surprise you. I spent a good chunk of my summer working on a pro bono case – my officemate spent probably 75% of his time on another. The American legal profession, for entirely terrible reasons, has a bigger sense of *noblesse oblige*, and that means there are huge opportunities for pro bono practice.

"Corporate law or great big financial transactions" is therefore a pretty poor descriptor of the things I saw going on in New York. Yes, there is business to be done – but the idea that it isn't ever challenging or crazy or out-of-the-blue isn't rooted in actual experience. And the same goes for the idea that you will find fulfilment in every moment of any kind of career, whether it's writer, actor, teacher, professor, activist or Prime Minister.

And yes, there is money. Much of the disdain for money I hear around the school reminds me of upper-crust Victorian Britain, for whom talk of debt and money was vulgar. It was Somerset Maugham, I think, who suggested that only the rich have the luxury of not considering money in their lives. I agree with Derek that there is a lot of privilege at law school, and that we need to talk about it more than we do. But I don't think it's fair to say that we all have the privilege of disregarding money altogether.

Of course, none of these reflections necessarily go against Derek's argument. I think they're an extension, rather, of his point. People should do things that are important to them. I'm just tired of having it suggested to me – and anyone else that's going the conventional route – that I might (or, more often, must) be avoiding some kind of "true destiny." There's more than enough self-doubt in law school. Could we please stop judging each others' choices? ■

Age of Innocence

by Edmund Coates (Alumnus)

The legal profession has long had room for people in a hurry. Apparently, some 19th century trial judges in England did not leave the bench to relieve themselves. Their number was kept about the same for decades at a stretch, despite increasing population and burgeoning litigiousness (or maybe because of it, since many litigants or accused were from the middle classes or lower, while the elite and the well-connected could resolve a wide range of things through non-legal avenues). Given time pressures and the increasing volume, it's not surprising that these judges got more and more formalistic in their judgments.

My friend Jakub Adamski (now at Davies in Toronto, but at times almost a divided co-owner of the law school) once showed me a 19th century barrister's memoir, which recounted the following episode. Before the judge arrived to open the session, the court clerk emptied the dregs of an ink-well into the chamberpot behind the bench (in order to then refill the ink-well with fresh ink). During the session, the judge suddenly turned pale, and his clerk approached the bench to ask him what was the matter. The judge gestured to him to look behind the bench, and pointed to the chamberpot, now a good bit filled with blue-tinged liquid. The clerk whispered an explanation, to which the judge exclaimed "thank goodness, I thought I'd ruptured myself".

The start of each year at McGill Law School sees some students griping about Foundations. I, and some my friends in my first year, ourselves indulged. Foundations is definitely not a course tailored to people in a hurry. But Foundations is a course which alumni who graduated years ago bring up in conversation, in regard to what they took from law school. There may be a gap between what students now in Foundations think of the course, and what they will think of it years in retrospect. Perhaps part of the answer is the implicit model of law and legal practice that some students bring with them when they enter law school.

Most people agree that the human mind is based on the brain. So, computer scientists could, in theory, create artificial intelligence by crafting a computer program that individually modeled each neuron of a brain (and by setting things up so that this synthetic brain could acquire the appropriate input). But this approach would mean modeling the human brain's over 100 billion neurons. This rationalist, heavy-lifting, approach would demand an impossibly large amount of resources and information, even to get off the ground.

Some people have an ideal of law as like a "100 billion neuron simulating computer". However, a rational legal system fitting this notion would need to be far more complex than the computer project. It would need to encompass an enormous number of past, present, and future human interactions. Conversely, the system would need to be at least minimally comprehensible for the people it governed (as well as comprehensible enough for individual experts so that they could both master fair-sized chunks of it and see how those chunks fit into the whole). The rationalist ideal of a legal calculus, a calculus yielding secure answers after complex enough permutations, is absurd. But, as a tempting ideal, the frustrations it kindles are real.

Our legal system is a human system, with the vices and virtues of a human system. To the extent it would seek to be a machine, it would seek to be opaque and inhumane. Our legal system's life-blood, the necessary condition for its dynamism and effectiveness, is bounded discretion. And even the bounds of these discretions are a question of fringes rather than of sharp lines.

Allow me to point to some broad examples, out of many. Law school classes usually focus on judgments, and thus on individual judges. Yet the other judges in the system are the essential audience of judgments. In setting-out reasons for judgment, a judge will be guided by her sense of justice, but her choices will be structured by her feel for what will work with the audience of other judges.

Trends in legal doctrine serve as a particular guide for the judge's performance, but they are not enough. She has to surmise what elements of a set of trends should be reinforced and which discouraged, or at least not contributed to. Most judgments give this dynamic web, at most, a small push. But many small pushes add up to trends, trends which even occasionally lead to irreversible mutations. This phenomenon is far wider than just the notion of precedent. It affects what judges will look for, pay attention to, and even how the chief justices of trial courts and courts of appeal will assign the more energetic and creative judges.

Pervasively, administrative agencies have larger mandates, and preside over greater thickets of legislation, than they have the resources to fully pursue. Those who establish, administer, and influence the agencies have learnt that this arrangement is more effective than to try to keep the agencies on strict jurisdictional diets. So the staff of an agency makes an evolving, sometimes conflicting, set of choices as to how vigorously to apply given legislation (notably regarding which parties and situations require particular attention). Of course, the public prosecution service in criminal matters, and the various ▶

regulatory authorities in financial and securities matters, count as such agencies.

Taught well, Foundations is the course in law school that is closest to the real world of legal practice. Other courses tend to focus on cases or doctrine, and are thus full of answers (often too many answers for the number of questions). Yet problems in legal practice often arise in ways that makes their formulation and even their status as problems, unclear. Sometimes only the advent of a possible solution will bring the existence of a legal problem into focus.

Foundations cannot give students a wisdom about the law, which reflective people achieve after decades of practice. But the fact that the course does not achieve the impossible is hardly a flaw. There have to be some answers in Foundations, since the course is part of the economy of the law school, which demands an output of marks and numbers. Still, its principal role should be to awaken certain sensitivities, or cultivate these sensitivities in people in whom they are already awakened. Such sensitivities allow us to orient ourselves in sub-cultures of legal practice, and yet allow us to stand back, periodically, from aspects of those sub-cultures. Only by seeking this sort of poise and perspective can we seek a certain clarity about who is being hurt and who is being helped (and a certain clarity about when, by patience and small pushes, we can make a difference). ■

If T.S. Eliot Were An Antidumping Lawyer

by Akbar Hussain (Law II)

Diary Time Entry for Client #453TyUH, Matter #005
August 13, Time Entered 11.3 Hours
Billing rate 375$/hour
T.S. Eliot, Esq., Attorney number L077

Comments:

We are men,
important and far from home.
Our trousers match our jackets and we
spit staccato abbreviations, careful to be just self-important enough:
Did you match the Q and V to the GL?

Well, did you?

In this unlovely town the smell of shrimp
having value added to them
is on your hotel room pillow
like a chocolate mint.

I feel awkward in my smock in the plant,
towering oafishly above the industrious
deveiners, freezers and beheaders of shrimp.
A woman says she deveins eight shrimp
every ten seconds.

She assures me she is faster than any Teutonic machine.
I remember her blurred blade and the pale blue spinal column it sought out
as I rifle through accounting ledgers.

Another eight shrimps, as we manufacture answers
for bureaucrats from a distant land.

An Afternoon With Mary Robinson

by Adam Goodman (Alumnus I)

On May 2, 2004, in the pages of the *Montreal Gazette*, McGill history professor Gil Troy ignited an academic firestorm over his university's decision to grant an honorary law degree to Mary Robinson. As the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Robinson presided over the infamous Durban Conference Against Racism in 2001 which ironically descended into a virulent anti-Semitic atmosphere both inside and outside the official meetings. Troy expressed his belief that her stewardship of the conference, inability to reign in on the anti-Semitism and her characterization of the conference as a "success" made her an inappropriate choice for an honorary degree.

It is most unfortunate that the debate that followed Troy's opinion piece, in the *Gazette* and elsewhere, all too often consisted of personal attacks on him and his credibility as a historian instead of the issues he raised. One malcontent even took advantage of the *McGill Reporter*'s inattentive editorial staff and published a slanderous and thinly veiled anti-Semitic attack on Troy and his "moneyed" friends. The more respectful demonizations fit into a strangely Canadian pattern – a zealous, almost religious belief in the institutions and personalities of the United Nations taken to the point of abusing anyone who dares to question their utility.

Since the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2000, the Jewish community has found itself in this position far too often – astonished by one-sided resolutions emanating from the UN General Assembly and Security Council that condemn Israel's actions but make no mention of what provoked them; amazed that member states ponder a new resolution once again libelling Zionism, the national liberation ideology of the Jewish people, with racism; and flabbergasted with the apathy of the UN Secretariat to Israeli suffering at the hands of suicide bombers.

However, the debate initiated by Troy has yielded beneficial and indeed surprising results. Thanks to the efforts of the executives of the Jewish Law Students' Association and the cooperation of Dean of Law Nicholas Kasirer, Ms. Robinson agreed to meet with concerned law students and faculty on the afternoon of June 5, following her convocation from McGill's Faculty of Law. I had the privilege of attending this meeting.

Although touching upon subjects sensitive to both the Jewish students and Ms. Robinson, the meeting progressed in an extremely cordial and candid fashion. Indeed, by the end of the tête-à-tête, previously critical opinions of Mary Robinson had changed one-hundred and eighty degrees. I emerged from the meeting with hope that even in the sometimes unwelcoming halls of the United Nations, the Jewish community need not feel alone.

Robinson characterized the anti-Semitism at Durban as "terrible" and admitted that she had "never known anything like it." She offered no excuses or contextualizations for the anti-Semitic shenanigans of participating NGOs, nor for the attempt of member states to equate the systematic murder of Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe with the suffering of Palestinians at the hands of Israel. In fact, she shed light on her behind the scenes manoeuvring to ensure the text of the conference made no comparisons at all to the Holocaust, nor singled out the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Unlike her previous statements praising the outcome of Durban, Robison limited her support for the conference to the mere fact that it produced a text that the vast majority of conference members could support and was found to be acceptable by Shimon Peres, then Israel's foreign minister. Moreover, when asked whether a new conference should be convened to truly tackle racism, she immediately rejected the proposition saying that like Durban, a new process would only result in further "political manoeuvring."

Indeed, the biggest surprise of the afternoon was Robinson's candour in admitting the many faults of the UN system and the perversion of its processes for political gain in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. She admitted that Israel's enemies have used the UN, its institutions and even the discourse of international human rights as political tools. At the very least, Robinson's candid evaluation of the system she represented should hearten Israel's friends the next time its critics rely on a UN resolution condemning the Jewish State.

Initially, the McGill Jewish Law Students Association shared Prof. Troy's discomfort at Ms. Robinson's honorary degree. After the meeting, the group left satisfied not only because Robinson validated our opinions on the biases of the UN and its institutions, but also because an important dialogue had been established.

At the meeting, Ms. Robinson told us that she did not believe the published attacks on her record helped anyone. All in all, I found that statement to be her only comment with which I disagreed. On the contrary, the debate initiated by Prof. Troy and others like him have had an apparent effect on the thinking of ▶

Mary Robinson and have forced her to revaluate the Durban conference, and indeed, the entire UN system.

It should be noted that the controversy over honouring Mary Robinson did not start in Montreal. In Atlanta, when Jewish students at Emory University learned that Robinson was receiving an honorary degree, they circulated a petition demanding another commencement speaker be found. That crisis was defused by Ms. Robinson's agreement to meet with her critics after Emory's March commencement. In talking with Emory students, Robinson was forced to take into account a point of view that was all too often sidelined in her previous profession: the Jewish point of view.

And as her conversations with McGill students and faculty in early June have demonstrated, the message is getting through. By the end of the hour-long meeting, Robinson could be embraced as someone whom the Jewish students of McGill and indeed the entire Jewish community of Montreal can be honoured to call an honorary alumnus of their university and city.

Without the opportunities presented by the convocation controversies at McGill and Emory, this dialogue would not have taken place and both the Jewish community and Mary Robinson would have been the poorer for it. Prior to the debate over her honorary degrees, it is doubtful Robinson appreciated the depth of the pain caused by Durban. Now, she no longer refers to that conference as an unqualified success.

In the end, none of this could have taken place in Montreal without the controversy started by Gil Troy's article that flew in the face of the prevailing ideological winds.

In fact, the only drawback to this fascinating episode is the fact that Prof. Troy was not invited to the meeting with Mary Robinson. Ironically, they would have discovered that they agreed on much. ■

In the Waiting room, September 9, 2004

by Julie Wong (Law III)

I am sitting in the waiting room at the McGill Student Health Clinic. There are as many men as women in this waiting room: 4 men, 4 women, including myself. The receptionist has a nasal, loud, and abrasive voice which makes you wonder why she decided to talk with people all day long for a career when she seems barely able to suppress her obvious contempt for us who've dared to be sick and not by appointment. There is a Magritte poster on the wall facing me, a never-used TV in the corner, posters advising disrespectful SARS-carriers to take their lack of consideration elsewhere, and, of course, ads both for cheap condoms available for purchase nearby and a sexualityandu.ca website for us to link up to our "sexual well-being."

No one looks happy here. We might as well be on the river Styx, waiting to be carried across by one who only ferries others elsewhere. (What is his name again?) Seems an appropriate image given the stench of waiting-for-godot malaise in the air and the river-like streets outside, unexpectedly deluged with sheets of rain; perhaps they feel like drenched rats too - hard slickness though instead of living human sticky softness. It's our porousness that makes us feel dirty.

I have Kundera's Unbearable Lightness of Being beside me, and though it tempts me, I choose to trouble the blank void of a clean electronic sheet of paper with my noisiness. It has been long since I have written, long since I have engaged in any reflection, long since I have felt quiet, full of time for pause, and the urge and peace, really, to write for me, or just for the occasion of writing itself, or to feel heard by some unforeseeable but vaguely receptive other. Have I forgotten my private joys in the clamour of the student lawyering madding crowd? I must have for I supersaturate this momentary writing with far too many literary allusions to be acceptably modest.

The well has run dry. I've exhausted the elusive muse. It is back to looking for moral sanity outside of myself. It is a troubled seeking. ■

It's Up to You: Advice to Second-Year Students

by Derek McKee (Law III)

Editor's note: This article was supposed to be included in last week's issue. However, by our editorial mistake, second part was published instead. We apologize for the error.

In past years, the first couple of Quid issues have been filled with advice to first-year students. In my experience, though, first-year students are too preoccupied with a new school, new friends and a new home to have much use for such heartfelt testimonials. So I'd like to direct my unasked-for earnestness to those who are able to do something with it. You second-year students are in a unique position. You finally know how to be a law student, yet most of law school is still ahead of you. How will you make the best use of your remaining time?

Shop Till You Add/Drop

Perhaps you came to law school with a bright-eyed interest in Pumpkin Law, confident that this would be your career path. You were disappointed that you couldn't take Pumpkin Law in first year, but you knew it would be worth the wait. Whenever you could, you contemplated the implications of Pumpkin Law for contracts, torts and the Constitution.

However, when you met second year students who were taking Pumpkin Law, they all seemed unhappy. They complained about Professor X's boring lectures, and they urged you not to take any courses with this professor. But you knew better: you attributed these students' attitude to their insufficient interest in Pumpkin Law. You had the boldness, the self-confidence to register for Professor X's course in spite of the bad reviews.

Your second year begins, and in the first week you find yourself face-to-face with Professor X. Unfortunately, it's as bad as they said. The syllabus looks fascinating, but Professor X rambles nervously, can't explain the material, and misses the point of every question. You find yourself playing solitaire on your laptop just to stay awake.

During the first week of class you also go to a lecture in Turnip Law, which is taught by Professor Y. You never had the remotest interest in Turnip Law, but you heard that Professor Y is good, so you thought you'd see for yourself. Guess what? The lecture is fascinating. Professor Y has interesting ideas and knows how to communicate them. It crosses your mind that you might want to take this class. Except that your schedule is already full. However, if you dropped Pumpkin Law...

Does this sound familiar? If it does, take Turnip Law. All you will get out of this Pumpkin Law course is a new high score in solitaire. Even worse, Professor X could turn you off a topic that you had always found interesting, because now it will carry the baggage of all those hours you wasted in lecture (and if you are really passionate about Pumpkin Law, you'll have other chances to learn about it: on the job, through volunteer work, or by arranging a term essay).

Whether a course is worthwhile depends almost entirely on how it is taught. The subject matter is usually irrelevant. If you reflect on your time in CEGEP or university, you will probably recognize this. Law school is no different. And yet, too many McGill law students start off each semester having already picked their courses. They decline the opportunity to "shop" for courses, and they let the add/drop date slip past them. Then they masochistically endure the semester (albeit with plenty of complaining).

Really, unless sitting through badly-taught courses is one of the legal profession's initiation rites (akin to hazing in the army), this behaviour makes no sense to me. In first year, you had very little control over who your professors were, so perhaps you were right to whine. Now it's up to you. Take your time, during the first week or two, to sit in on lots of classes and check out different professors. McGill has some great teachers, even if their courses don't have catchy titles. It's up to you to find them and learn from them.

Now that I've written this rant, I'd like to qualify it. Good teachers are the main reason for picking courses, but they're not the only reason. It's perfectly legitimate to pick courses because your friends are taking them. It takes work to maintain friendships in law school, and taking courses together is a good way to do that (ideally, you can convince your friends to join you in a well-taught course). Naturally, there are some courses you're required to take. Regardless, don't let anyone scare you about filling "baskets." Do the math: unless your choice of courses is extremely eccentric (or you are planning to go on an exchange), your baskets will fill themselves.

Be Selective About Extracurriculars

You've slaved away, you've pulled the all-nighters, and you've made the grade. First year is behind you, so now what will you do with all this time? Lend your legal skills to people who need them? Organize an international conference? Redesign a Web site? Mastermind a fundraising strategy? Many second-year students long to ▶

explode onto the extracurricular scene. They get involved in every activity that appears to reflect some facet of their identity: Intramural sports, student politics, ethno-cultural groups... or all of the above.

This sounds like a good idea in principle. It's true that second-year students have more free time than first-year students, but there are limits. As a result of all this joining, many students overextend themselves. Perhaps even worse, many clubs and associations have to deal with long lists of semi-committed members who are always too busy to meet.

Pick one or two extracurriculars and stick to them. Your commitment and the depth of your involvement in these activities will be far more rewarding than the illusory freedom of dabbling in several.[1] ■

[1] As an illustration, I'd like to mention the Law Journal, which I realize is co-curricular, not extracurricular. But one of the greatest things about the Law Journal is that it demands a two-year commitment. I realize that this turns some people off from applying, but the two-year commitment is precisely what makes the Law Journal such a worthwhile experience. At the end of

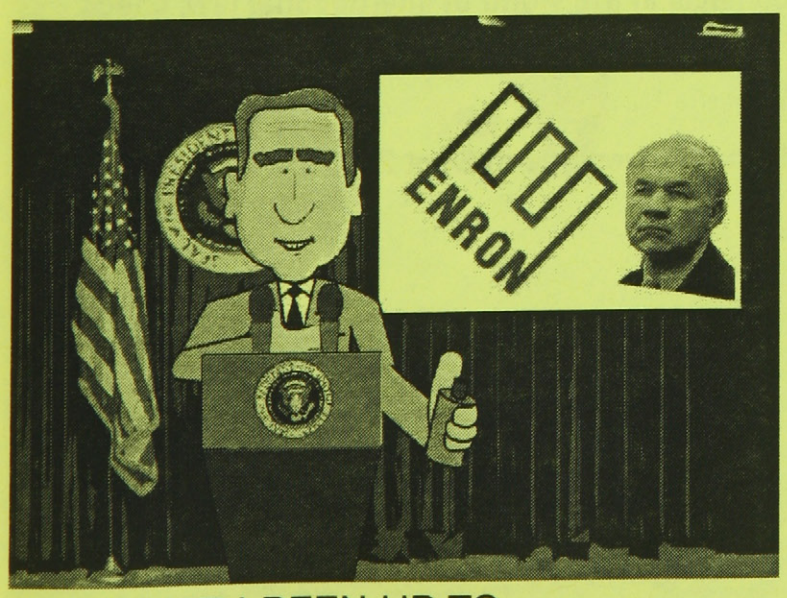
More US Election Propaganda

by Aram Ryu (Law III)

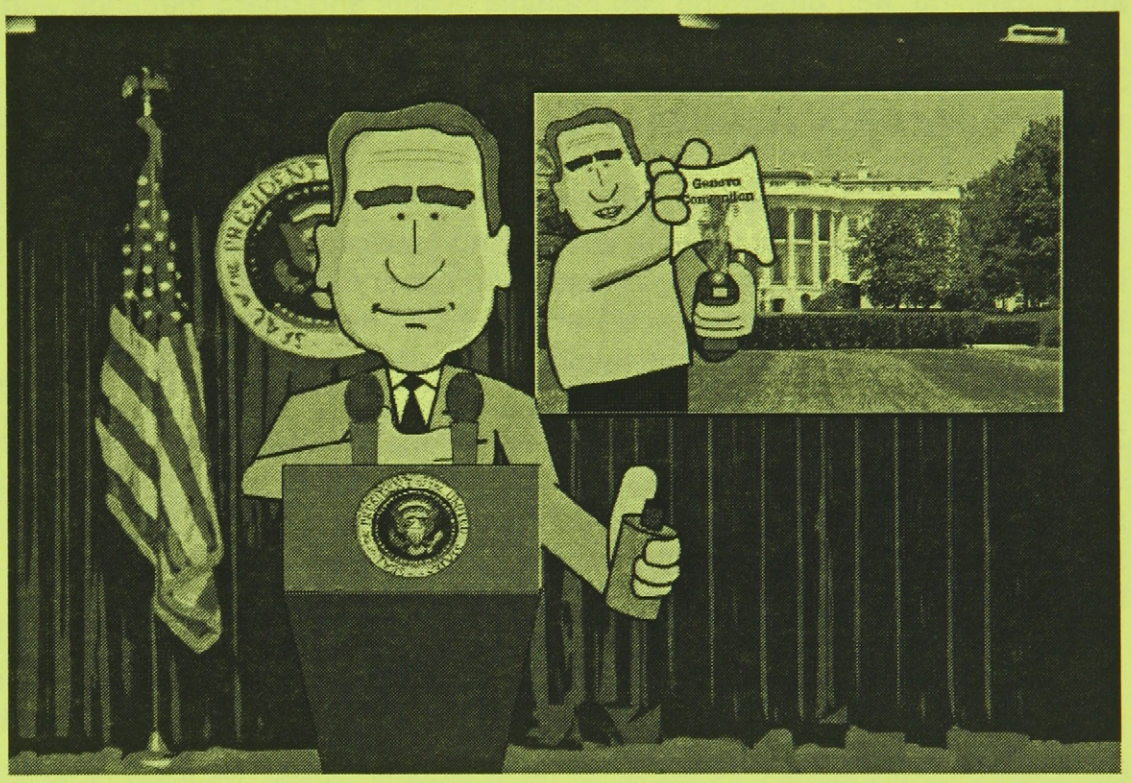
Moveon.org is pretty well known for its use of "voters fund"to create interesting advertisement for this upcoming US election. They recently held a contest *Bush in 30 seconds* in order to "bring new talent and new messages into the world of mainstream political advertising".

Whether all the claims made in these short advertisements are true or not, the contest itself is a right step towards getting people involved (especially the youth). However, it seems very unlikely that any Republicans (or bush supporters) would take these seriously enough to change thier minds.

You can check out the ads here:
http://www.bushin30seconds.org/



from WHAT I BEEN UP TO. . .



7 reasons for running the contest (from moveon.org)

1. It appears that the Bush Administration has consistently misled the American public about Iraq.
2. The Bush Administration's regressive environmental policies have lowered cleanliness standards for our air and water.
3. Bush is underfunding education.
4. The Bush Administration's Patriot Act threatens our constitutional rights and civil liberties.
5. Bush's Tax Cuts only benefit the rich.
6. 3.3 million jobs (93,000 in August of 2003 alone) have been lost since Bush took office.
7. Bush is underfunding homeland security.

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More details on the CISDL are available at:

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